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Viewing cable 08MANAGUA418, LIBERAL DEPUTIES OPTIMISTIC ON ELECTION,

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Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

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Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#08MANAGUA418**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08MANAGUA418	2008-04-08 22:00	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Managua

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758456.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758467.aspx>
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<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3967/barreto-era-ldquo-fuente-confiable-rdquo-para-eeuu>

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FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2398
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RUMIAAA/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MANAGUA 000418

SIPDIS

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STATE FOR WHA/CEN AND DRL
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/07/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [NU](#)
SUBJECT: LIBERAL DEPUTIES OPTIMISTIC ON ELECTION,
PESSIMISTIC ON ORTEGA GOVERNMENT

Classified By: Ambassador Paul Trivelli, Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

SUMMARY

11. (C) National Assembly Deputies from the Constitutional Liberal Party (PLC) are concerned about the direction of the Ortega government. In particular, they are worried that the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) decision to suspend elections in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN) would provoke another political and constitutional crisis, represent an over reach of the authority of the CSE, and set a dangerous precedent that the government might use to cancel other elections where they feel politically threatened. Deputies characterized the government as a "failure," and believe Ortega and First Lady Rosario Murillo are using the Citizen Power Councils (CPCs) to establish a parallel FSLN structure to consolidate their hold over the country. At the same time, the Deputies are optimistic about their chances to gain additional seats in the upcoming municipal elections and spoke positively of Managua mayoral candidate Eduardo Montealegre and their alliance with Montealegre's movement, Vamos Con Eduardo. Left unsaid was the potential role ex-President and PLC leader Arnoldo Aleman could play in stifling Montealegre's chances in Managua or in collaborating with the FSLN to further erode democratic space in Nicaragua.
End Summary.

12. (U) On March 28, as part of an outreach effort to party leaders of the four main parties in the National Assembly, Ambassador hosted a lunch with four senior Deputies from the Constitutional Liberal Party (PLC). Participants included: Francisco Aguirre Sacasa (PLC party secretary, former Foreign Minister and Ambassador to the U.S. and current chair of the Production, Economic and Budget Committee); Jose Pallais (former Vice-Minister of Government and Foreign Affairs and current chair of the Justice Committee); Maximino Rodriguez (former Contra leader, chief of the PLC party (bancada) in the National Assembly and member of the Justice Committee and the Peace, Defense and Human Rights Committee); and Carlos Noguera Pastora (President of the Tourism Committee).

Postponement of Elections in the RAAN

13. (C) The Deputies expressed serious concern over reports that the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) is likely to announce the suspension of municipal elections in three municipalities in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN). Rodriguez argued that the CSE does not have the

authority to suspend the elections (Note: The CSE issued a decision to suspend the election late in the evening of April 14. End Note). "They can't assume authority that the law doesn't give them." Noguera commented that the actions of the CSE were likely to blow elections in the RAAN out of proportion to both their population and economic importance and create another national crisis. At a minimum, in Pallais' view, it would create another crisis in the National Assembly, and he noted that the PLC and deputies of Vamos Con Eduardo (VCE) blocked further legislative work on March 27 in protest of FSLN and President Ortega's support for suspension of the elections. Rodriguez echoed the concerns of the others that the suspension in the RAAN on specious, and constantly changing, grounds would set a bad precedent for elections in the rest of the country. "If they can do it there, they can do it in any municipality at any time. What would stop them from canceling elections in Managua?"

14. (C) Pallais believes that the postponement is designed to secure FSLN Deputy Brooklyn Rivera's continued hold over the region and prevent devastating losses in the elections. President Ortega and his wife, Rosario Murillo, support Rivera because he is another proponent of "direct democracy," similar to what Ortega-Murillo have engineered through the Citizen Power Councils (CPCs) in the rest of the country. Rivera, in the past, has denounced traditional elections as "an invention of the Spanish" and relies on local indigenous councils as his base of support and power. If he fails, Pallais commented, it would be a blow to Ortega's national effort at "direct democracy."

Optimistic About Municipal Elections and Liberal Alliance

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15. (C) The Deputies were optimistic about their chances to hold their current number of municipalities and make gains in the upcoming elections. Noguera expressed the view that the PLC-VCE alliance would win "no less than 80 municipalities" -- and could win a few more than that (out of 153). All agreed the priority is to win Managua, dismissing media reports that the PLC is working to undermine VCE candidate Eduardo Montealegre. Noguera noted that the elections will be a challenge, especially in Managua and will "cost a lot." Aguirre Sacasa, reflecting on previous elections cycles, commented that if the PLC-VCE alliance can win Managua, they win the country. In 2004, the Liberals lost badly, but Aguirre Sacasa believes the 2008 elections will be different -- Ortega and the FSLN are now in power and have managed the country poorly. The elections are turning into a referendum on Ortega and the VCE-PLC alliance helps "polarize" the choice facing the electorate.

16. (C) Rodriguez noted that the actual electoral process will be a challenge. They will need to work hard to get the vote out. More importantly, the alliance will need between 10,000 and 15,000 party poll watchers, in part to make up for the fact that the FSLN will, in effect, control all the municipal and departmental electoral commissions. The problem, in Rodriguez's view, is that the VCE-PLC alliance does not yet have those people identified and lacks the financial resources to organize and train them. Getting the vote out on election day will similarly be critical and will present a logistical and financial challenge.

17. (C) Aguirre Sacasa expressed concern that the private sector would not contribute to the alliance, making the task all the more difficult. In particular, he is concerned that the Conservative Party (PC) had put forward its own candidate, prominent businessman Mauricio Mendieta, and has not joined the alliance. He believes the PC's decision not to join was Montealegre's fault, but acknowledged that the PLC (by implication Aleman) had been meeting with PC separately to form their own alliance. The private sector could use Mendieta's candidacy as an excuse not to provide

financial support, claiming the democratic forces remained divided and drawing off the "country club" financial backers.

Moreover, the PC's running its own candidate and Montealegre's former party, the Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (ALN) also running their own candidate, could serve to draw key percentages of votes away from the alliance, especially in Managua, due to simple voter confusion. Aguirre Sacasa believes the Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS) will not hurt the alliance's chances, but would rather continue to draw votes away from the FSLN, particularly in light of dissatisfaction among Sandinista's with Ortega's administration.

ORTEGA GOVERNMENT "A FAILURE"

18. (C) Not surprisingly, the Deputies characterized the Ortega administration as "a failure." Aguirre Sacasa commented that Ortega has failed in every key program - the CPCs, Zero Hunger, Zero Usury, etc. While the people see this, even those from the FSLN base, this hasn't stopped Ortega. In Noguera's view, Ortega-Murillo are working to stay in power as long as possible and are concentrating more power in their hands. The CPCs are key to this effort and Pallais revealed that the FSLN is looking to change the law on civic participation to further concentrate power into the hands of the CPCs and Ortega. According to Pallais, the CPCs are a parallel structure of the FSLN for the express purpose of ensuring Ortega family control over all aspects of party and government. While the CPCs failed as a bottom-up movement from the base, they are now a well-paid professional parallel structure. "What we have is a Marxist-Leninist family-based authoritarian government." Both Aguirre Sacasa and Pallais believe that the funds for the CPCs are coming directly from Venezuela and would remain outside of the national budget so as to prevent the National Assembly from exercising oversight.

COMMENT

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19. (C) The PLC Deputies were upbeat on the elections and, surprisingly, refrained from their usual criticism of Montealegre and others of the VCE. While their remarks were likely tailored for the USG audience, they did express a greater sense that the Liberals (PLC and VCE) and the broader pro-democratic movement faced a common threat in the anti-democratic tendencies of the Ortega government and that the municipal elections are critical to facing that threat. The unspoken elephant in the room remains ex-president and convicted felon Arnoldo Aleman and the role he continues to play in the PLC and nationally through the "Pacto" with the FSLN. Only a passing reference to Aleman was made by Rodriguez, more in reference to "errors" in U.S. policy in previous elections. All four deputies have made public and private criticisms of Aleman and would like to position themselves to be the leader of the Liberals when he passes from the political scene. However, none have demonstrated a willingness to directly challenge Aleman's continued leadership of the party or make a move that would hasten his departure. Aleman's continued control over the party, especially through the CSE and CSJ, continue to raise concerns about how long the VCE-PLC alliance, and Montealegre's candidacy in particular, will last and whether any of the concerns the PLC Deputies raised will be addressed in the coming months.

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